

The Braid Box

Fostering Integration & Community through Hair Care



Danelle Thompson-Steinke has a talent for hair braiding and afro hair care. Since coming to Switzerland in 2014, she has met many families needing support in looking after their children's African hair. Looking around, Danelle quickly realized that there was no one in the area who could offer specialized hair care to these families, so she took matters into her own hands and created [The Braid Box](#).

At the start, Danelle would visit her clients as part of her mobile salon service. Nowadays, she has her own space in a salon in Schwamendingen, Zurich, where parents can go with their children for their afro-textured hair care and hair styling needs.

In an interview with journalist Rossana A. Ammann, the founder of the The Braid Box talks about her motivation behind building her business, noting in particular her clients' appreciation of the advice and cultural lessons she gives and the self-confidence children visibly gain with time from embracing their natural hair.

Danelle will be with The Braid Box at the WEGA Fair in Weinfelden, Canton Thurgau; 26th - 30th September 2019. WEGA is one the most popular family fairs for all generations in the region.

Rossana: What does braiding and hair care mean to you?

Danelle: I believe that hair care and hair braiding is not just part of a routine, but a strong social tool that can bring together people from different cultural backgrounds.



How did you start doing that? How did you realize it?

Danelle: When I was visiting clients and their children at their home, I realized that hair care was not the only thing they needed help with. Parents with adopted children from Africa for example are raising children from a different cultural background. The children ask questions that their adoptive parents sometimes cannot answer. So even though the business started for hair care, it's become much more than that. It's social, it's cultural. It's about building a supportive community for the kids and the parents.

Danelle has been able to do hair since her university days studying International Business Management. "That was the skill I used in university and college to make some extra money: by braiding hair!", the SINGApreneur says.

At the moment, she is supporting over 13 families in St. Gallen, Zurich and Thurgau - some of them since 2015. Now that she has opened her salon in Schwamendingen, Zurich, she wants to reach more clients who could benefit from her unique hair care services.

Besides braiding hair, Danelle also consults her clients and imparts know-how on how to best manage and care for unique hair types. For example, she will teach some night-time hair care routines 3 to 4 times, the goal being that after that the parents or children can do it themselves.

What concerns do the parents have when coming to you with their children? Not only about hair but culturally speaking...

Danelle: I have built a relationship with the parents so that they feel comfortable talking about many things. Usually, they won't directly tell me what is happening, but they will 'let me in' softly. One day, a parent asked me how I deal with a child asking about "white or black families", or why their hair is the way it is and if people can touch it or not. Children observe things. They see and ask questions and it doesn't matter how old they are. Parents want to know how to deal with such questions.

Where do you see The Braid Box going in the next 5 years?

Danelle: I see the business growing but also reaching more people outside of my original target audience. I want to continue building a community for families who need this kind of support. In the next five years, I also see us potentially working with the Gemeinden (municipalities) in different cantons of Switzerland.

Who is the target audience then?

Danelle: I have more than one. First, mixed race families with adopted children, whom I support with afro hair care. Also children - and of course adults - with straight, curly and all hair types (for individual treatment). There is no age limit, however, if we start instilling the practice of taking care of one's hair early, it makes it easier for children later.

You also have a party service called "The Braid Bar", which anyone can book. Tell us more!

"The Braid Bar" is ideal as additional entertainment at birthday parties, hen parties or any fun social festival or event and is appropriate for all hair types. We come to you, you pick your braid from our colourful menu and we make sure you have a fun time

with it. The Braid Bar is actually part of our "Integration through Hair" initiative. Being from a migration background, I had to figure out a way to get in touch with people around me and in my community. Realizing that braids are so loved here in Switzerland, I decided to create this service. It has been a big success. So far I have done several events since launching The Braid Bar.

Danelle Steinke is originally from Jamaica and, as a migrant woman with a different (complicated) hair type, the stories of her clients and children touch her personally. She wants to reduce the frustration of both parents and kids and support them in managing their hair care needs in a more positive, empowering way.



Do you currently need any support?

Danelle: Yes. Financial support is always welcome - to expand the salon, to buy equipment and products, to invest in marketing, just to name a few. I would also like to do a course in the USA and it costs a lot as well. It would prepare me better to serve the clients by expanding on my knowledge and skills in afro-textured hair care, but it costs a lot.

What advice would you give people who would like to start their own business projects in Switzerland?

Danelle: First, mentally prepare yourself for a roller-coaster of a journey. It is not easy but if you want to do it, go for it and don't do it alone - try to find support from a local organization, like SINGA. And when you feel down, don't stay down. Lift yourself up and keep moving forward. You have to! Especially if you are not from here and you want to start a business in the country you have to seek support and push yourself.

What drives you and motivates you every day to keep going?

Danelle: The children who I support. My clients. They drive me, I feel I have to do this for them. As a woman, you love your hair and when your hair is good then you feel your best. The children motivate me to go further, also the ones I haven't reached yet. I know the impact it will have on their confidence, their mentality and their future. We want to be the middle person -between parents and kids- who tells them to love their hair and be authentic.

This interview was held in English by Venezuelan journalist, storyteller and volunteer Rossana A. Ammann, who is passionate about multiculturalism, people's stories and organizational talent development. You can find her work and more about her via [LinkedIn](#)

Rossana Ammann, 2019, July 3rd